



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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July 13, 2008  
9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Romans 8:26, 27  
Pastor Keith Haag

First Lesson: Joel 3:12-16  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 18  
Second Lesson: Romans 8:26, 27  
Gospel: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

### **The Spirit Intercedes for Us**

To help us as we pray  
To lead us in God's way

We are almost halfway through the Pentecost season, and once again, this morning, the apostle Paul speaks to us concerning the work of the Spirit. We know that it is the Spirit who brings us to faith and he who keeps us in faith. To the Corinthians Paul wrote, "Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says Jesus be cursed and no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." And to the Galatians he wrote, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." We can understand then the wisdom of those who drew up our liturgy and who encouraged us to speak very often that prayer that David first prayed a long time ago—"Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me." The Spirit strengthens and renews us daily. He sanctifies us.

One work of the Spirit that we might not think of that often is that he intercedes for us. We naturally think of the ascended Lord Jesus before the throne of God interceding for us daily, but here the apostle Paul teaches us that the Holy Spirit also intercedes for us. And of course that too is for our daily blessing. The Spirit helps us to pray and he of course would lead us in God's way.

The apostle Paul impresses upon us here that no matter how strong a Christian we may be, we all have some kind of weakness in our life of prayer. Sometimes we may find ourselves praying for things that are not really the best for us. Other times we may find ourselves actually praying for things that are contrary to God's will. We do wrestle in our prayer life wondering exactly what it is that we are to pray for and exactly how we should be praying day after day.

Prayer is an exercise of faith. And when our faith is weak, we should be praying more. But we often find ourselves praying less. And that is understandable because you do not tend to exercise when you are feeling weak. So we need to pray that God's Holy Spirit will indeed come to us and help us and bless us in our prayer life.

Paul says that when those times come that we don't know how to pray, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

I think most of us have had experiences where we don't know exactly what to pray. When a loved one is ill, we naturally pray, "Oh Lord, spare my loved one. Restore him or her to health if it be your good and gracious will." But if it is an elderly loved one, someone whose life has become very difficult, and if they are suffering and in great pain and it seems as though there cannot very easily be a recovery from their illness, we may find ourselves praying "Lord, take my loved one safely home to heaven and deliver him or her from this suffering that they are experiencing." So we may pray one thing on one occasion and another thing on another occasion.

A similar thing can happen when we have a difficult decision to make. We only naturally go before the Lord at such time and say, "Lord, please guide me to know what the best decision is for me in my life at this time. What should I do? Where should I go? How should I speak in this particular circumstance?" Perhaps you've had the experience that you've asked for the Lord's guidance and you've made a decision and then later you are completely convinced that you made the wrong decision. You may wonder, "Didn't the Lord guide me in the right way? What went wrong?" And of course, the devil would come to us at such times and say, "See, your prayers don't make any difference anyway. Why do you even bother with them?" But God comes to us and says there are simply things we do not understand.

So it is only natural that at times we do not know exactly what to pray for or even how to pray, but the Holy Spirit understands that and he knows us better than we know ourselves. So Paul says here then that the Spirit comes and intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. So the Spirit takes inner feelings and sighs that we cannot even understand fully ourselves and cannot give expression to ourselves and he renders them as beautiful prayers before the throne of God's grace. The Spirit intercedes for us. This means he takes our place before the throne of God and pleads for an answer to our prayer. And he prays the heavenly Father to strengthen and renew us in our hour of need.

Yes, the Spirit actually works within us. With groans and words that we could not begin to express ourselves—that's how close he is to us, living right within us by faith, renewing and strengthening our faith day after day, moving us to continue to pray even when we cannot understand how or why God answered the last prayer as he did. So we can only pray, "Oh Holy Spirit, continue to intercede for me." The Holy Spirit will assure us God is hearing and God will answer in the best possible way.

It is just after this that we read those familiar words from Paul in Romans. "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, those who have been called according to his purpose." So we pray, "Oh Holy Spirit, continue to intercede for me." There are times when I am very confused in my prayer life. And I don't know whether or not I am praying for that which my God wants for me at this particular time in my life.

I remember reading the story from a lady who had later married a pastor in her life. But she said at a time that she was beset with an illness. And of course her daily prayer was, "Lord, make me well." But the Lord chose to allow her to suffer for some time. And later on she said that she really felt that the Lord was leading her to see that that

was not the only prayer she was to pray. She was also to pray, "Lord help me to see the purpose for this affliction in my life at this time. Give me the patience and strength to see it through. Help me to confess my faith in you even at this difficult time in my life." So the Spirit does intercede for us and does continue to help us in our life of prayer.

We need to pray as that man who came to Jesus, "Lord I believe. Help my unbelief. Help me in my weakness." And the psalmist prays in a similar way when he says, "Strengthen me according to your word."

The apostle Paul then encourages us to pray for one another also under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit intercedes for us, we will intercede for one another. And we will pray for each other as Paul prayed for his fellow Christians in the congregation at Thessalonica. "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Spirit then would lift our prayers.

It's easy for us to pray for health or for wealth, but how often do we pray for stronger faith and a closer walk with the Lord? But those are things that we need far more than anything else. So the Spirit would continue to move us, continue to strengthen us. The Spirit reminds us that Jesus teaches us to pray first of all that God's kingdom would come, that God's name would be hallowed, and that God's will would be done among us. So these are things that we would indeed then be moved to pray first of all. We thank the Holy Spirit for interceding for us sometimes even when we are thinking very little of our Lord in our lives. But he understands our weaknesses. He knows them better than we know ourselves. So he lifts our thoughts to things above, where our Savior is seated at the right hand of God. He moves us to pray first of all for spiritual things.

And as the Spirit thus helps us in our life of prayer, he would also lead us in God's way. Paul assures us that the Spirit goes before our heavenly Father and continues to make all things right between us and our loving heavenly Father. He who searches our hearts, that is the Father, knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. So the Father also knows our inner groanings and sighings which we cannot give expression to and he does indeed accept them as prayers as the Spirit intercedes for us. This is natural because the Father and the Spirit are one. And here we are told that the will of God, the Father, and the will of the Spirit are one. Their will is in perfect harmony. Both desire our salvation. Both desire our daily sanctification, our growth in the Word and a desire to walk ever more closely with our Lord.

Sometimes we think of Jesus as interceding before the throne of God's grace in heaven. And it might be natural for us to think of the intercession of the Spirit as taking place in heaven also. And yet here, the implication from Paul seems to be that the intercession of the Spirit does also take place right within us as the Spirit is strengthening and renewing our faith, as he is giving expression to our prayers before God, he is pleading with God on our behalf. So we thank and praise him.

As the Spirit leads us in God's way, he leads us to know that we are one with all the saints. Notice he says he intercedes for the "saints" in accordance with God's will. So he is assuring you and me that we are members of his eternal church. We are numbered with his saints. Therefore, his Spirit will continue to work among. So we pray for each other as Paul prayed for his fellow Christians in Ephesus. "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."

And in the very next chapter he speaks of that great and glorious church, that eternal Zion in which the Lord gathers us all. "Consequently you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."

So when we are in confusion and uncertainty, the Spirit says no matter what is happening in your life, no matter how uncertain things seem to be, you can be certain of this—you are God's own. You are his child. He is working in your life. And even though you cannot see how, at this time, you can know that he is working in the best possible way. So the Spirit continues to lead us in God's way by assuring us that we are members of God's eternal church.

Then he would move us to share the gospel of Jesus with other people so that their hearts can also be touched by the Spirit so that they too can be gathered with God's people and made members of his eternal church. The Lord would lead us through his Spirit to live to God each day. Yes, to live in his way. So he says he will continue to intercede.

So no matter what we are doing, whether we are working or playing or relaxing or just meditating, the Spirit is present. And the Spirit would lead us to seek God's will for our lives, to pray, "Oh Lord, help me to see and to know what it is you want me to do this day or this week or this month or this year. I know you will lead. And I know you will guide. You will give me the guidance and strength that I need through your Word and Sacrament." And so we will pray, "Oh Holy Spirit, move me to bear those fruits of the Spirit that the apostle speaks of in Galatians—the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self control." The intercession of God's Spirit will continue for each and every one of us. He will not only bless us in our prayer life, but he will also lead us in our daily life of sanctification—lead us in God's way every day.

He will move us to confess our sins at the foot of the cross as we do before we receive the Sacrament. He will move us to pray for our fellow Christians and to pray for the world in which we live. We were reminded in the Old Testament lesson and in the Gospel this morning that we are living in the last times. I know it's easy and in every age we seem to think, "Well surely, Jesus will not actually return in my lifetime. That's going to happen, but surely not soon." But we do not know that. Jesus could return

tonight. He could return soon. And we want to be found doing his work. We want to be found concerned about his people and sharing his Gospel with the world in which we live.

That is why we continue to pray, "Oh Holy Spirit, intercede for us."